

539 Umurir' ugatiny' amazi.
Amaz (i)' atiny' ifu.

Fire fears water.
 Water fears flour. (3)

3. "Water fears flour," that
 is to say, the bread or "mush"
 into which it vanishes.

If' itiny' amenyo.

Flour fears teeth (4).

4. "Flour fears the teeth"
 of those who eat it.

Ameny' atiny' umuhoro.

Teeth fear the billhook (iron) (5).

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5. "Teeth fear the billhook,"
 as all other hard bodies, especially
 when made of iron, like the
 billhook, which is one of the most
 useful tools.

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The Blacks of Ruanda have a
 rich and varied oral literature.
 They like witticisms, and since
 their language is rich in shades
 and nuances, they manipulate
 it with great art.

The most refined speech is heard at the capital.

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The habitual frequenters of the court, lords, courtiers, and
 employees, express themselves in flawless language, use the right
 words and choice expressions, and give them the proper inflections,
 for Runyarwanda is a phonetic /sic/ language. The appointed men
 of letters, storytellers, bards, genealogists, and historians carefully
 watch their diction. Among them conversation is never /454/ dull,
 for jokes and witticisms abound.

[521]

Considering the good taste that distinguishes the familiars of
 the king and the inhabitants of the central province of Nduga, it is not

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Sentashonga, the victim's cousin, was granted permission that evening to have the corpse of his relative buried.

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The elders and former habitués of the court do not lack for narratives of this kind, which they relate like any other tale without seeming overly shocked by them. Such is the environment, such are the mores and attitudes. /485/

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"The king is the master," they say. "He does as he pleases. The decisions he makes cannot be contested. He is the supreme judge. One can only obey and assent." The victims' relatives were sometimes the first to come and greet him, feigning total impassiveness, forced as they were to drive back to the bottom of their hearts the bitter pain which they could not but feel.

Complaints, wails, and recriminations could only have stirred up the anger of the king and given rise to new slaughters.

While looking after his own safety, every person also had to keep in mind that of his people /relatives and friends/. The latter, indeed, might be held responsible for the deeds and actions, no matter how harmless, of any of their fellow members. The extermination of a whole family formerly weighed very little on the scale of royal justice.

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So as not to provoke trouble which might prove fatal, therefore, they put a good face on misfortune. These excoated, however innocent they might have been, were claimed in loud voices to have been cursed men (ibichibga) or rebels. To shed tears or express one's sorrow were crimes of high treason. "A mere whim of the master was sufficient to send a person to punishment. What won't one do to avoid so cruel a fate?" This statement made by a court favorite of the previous reign /avant-règne/ reveals a great deal about the mores of the time. "If the king happened to sprain his foot," added the same man, "to knock against some obstacle or pebble, it was not a good idea to meet with him at that moment."

In his anger the monarch might accuse anyone of having bewitched him, and wreak then and there a signal vengeance.

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Professional executioners were not always used for this purpose. The king might call upon any member of his retinue to carry out the task. The person had to comply, no matter how revolted he might

695 referred to simply as kushoko, "drinking." This fact indicates that the poison test was the oldest form. To give a person this test is called kushora which simply means "to give a drink." Thus they say: "Umututsi ashora inka ze (the Mututsi gives his cows a drink)," as well as "kushora ikihango (to drink poison)" and "kushora (literally, to drink a chicken)."

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Chapter 14

History and Chronology

173 Ruanda. I had great difficulty in obtaining data about the history of Ruanda. Oral tradition in the interlacustrine region is limited chiefly to the genealogy of the rulers. This basic skeleton is also generally supplemented by a few statements about the chief events of the corresponding epochs. My informants, however, knew little about the history of the dynasty, since most of them were Bahuru.

124 Musinga gave Captain W. Von Grawert, who introduced me to him, his royal promise that he would have reports made to me on the history of the country or even tell me about it himself.

[187] The chicken oracle, however, said that the king would suffer harm if I were initiated in the history of the country. The next time I visited Musinga and tried to have certain contradictions in my notes on the Ruanda rulers cleared up by this authoritative source, I was kept dangling for two and a half hours and was unsuccessful. His Black Majesty was very pleasant, but during the whole time he kept practicing, in German, the meaningless sentence, "Little spear is pretty."

Musinga wanted to please me by demonstrating his zeal in learning the German language and in this way divert my attention from interviewing him.

173 It seems that in Ruanda as well as in Nkole one may not speak about deceased kings with the uninitiated, for the spirits, disturbed in their rest, might avenge themselves. However, people talk about olden times in the evening when the nobility gather with the king, pay court to him, and drink beer. They know